

MFT 508: THEORETICAL & PERSONAL FOUNDATION  
OF MFT

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FAMILY VOYAGE PROJECT

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## **Updates of the family letter**

One of the assignments for the family voyage was to write a letter to a family member that you had anger towards. I wrote the letter but did not have the courage to make use of it. In the letter, professor asked some probing questions which set me thinking. In my mind, I thought I had stated the issue clearly. To answer the professor's question, I realized that I might have intentionally overlooked the details because it was still painful. I felt rehearsing the details would open the wound again and cause more arguments better to focus on what annoyed her and deal with it.

Please find below the details of my side for clarity.

sincerity, and transparency.

*Can you be more specific here? Did you both mutually contribute to this bad thing that happened?*

In 2014, when you came for the graduation ceremony of your daughter and her husband in Louisiana, you were very angry with me for somethings that happened on the graduation day. You did not return to me in New York as originally planned after the graduation and you cut off our relationship for almost five years. I am grateful to God that you prayed through and chose to forgive me. Thank you for restoring the

In 2014, my sister and her husband came to attend the graduation of her second child and her husband in New Orleans. They stayed with us in NY for about two weeks before they went for the graduation in New Orleans. We have a three-family house. We live on the first floor with one bedroom. The children live on the second and third floors with their families. My sister and her husband both stayed on the third floor with one of the children since we only had one bedroom.

I did not go to the graduation, because it would have caused problem between my husband and I. He never liked any of my siblings. But my second son (Ayodeji), and 5<sup>th</sup> daughter (Damilola), attended the graduation. My sister called on the day of the graduation that she was upset with her son in law and wanted to drive back to Houston after the graduation with my son. They had planned to stay with their daughter for the weekend before coming back to New York. I failed to convince her to stay with their original plan so as not to create problem for her daughter. I got angry and told her to find her way out of her daughter's apartment without involving anybody and that my son would not take her anywhere before or after the graduation. We were both upset and said harsh words to each other. She decided to take public transport to stay with my son in Houston. She stayed with him, instead of coming back to NY as originally planned, until it was almost time for them to return to Nigeria. I thought she was upset because of the argument we

had on the day of the graduation. All efforts to discuss the event proved abortive. She did not want to talk about it.

When she came back to NY, she continued to avoid me. I tried to have a private conversation with her, but she insisted her husband must be included in the meeting. She did not want to go out shopping with me. She rejected the money I had promised to give her. I had looked forward to her coming to NY. I felt rejected and bitter. I gave in and had the meeting with her and her husband present. With an anguished soul, I spoke out of bitterness for almost 30 minutes before my senses returned to me and I felt sad when I saw the confused fearful look on her face. I had seen that look many times when we were growing up. This time I could not hold her in my arms as in the past to drive that fear away.

Nothing I did or said afterwards got to her. She stopped talking and was just looking at me as if in shock. She spoke not a word to me. Then she blocked my number so I could not reach her for almost five years. I was shocked and sad that she could easily shut me out like that.

The second unfinished issue had to do with why I had to be cautious and afraid to be close to her.

relationship. During the years that I could not reach you, I felt like a part of my life was lost. I felt confused and rejected. Since you restored the relationship, I think I have become cautious and reserved in the way I interact with you so as not to cause offense again. I heard about my offense through other members of the family the offense that caused you to cut me off. I am writing this letter to request a meeting so I can hear directly from you what offended you and how we can avoid such a catastrophe in the future. I covet the past trust, frankness, and genuine care that we once had.

Is you currently?

Do you want her to call to this by phone, mail, or in person?

Is this a bad thing or good thing?

It would be very bad if I had to be cautious and reserved with her. We had been very close ever since she was born. I am nine years older than her, and I literally helped my mother in taking care of her. She was my baby sister. I backed her to sleep all the time. She followed me everywhere. We were inseparable. We had always been able to speak our minds to each other freely. Her cutting me off without telling me her mind was like a dagger in my heart. The rejection was devastating especially when I had pieced of what upset her from other siblings and the children. I felt I could never trust her again. And that I could never be close to her again. The heartbreak was too great to mend. Even though she said she forgave me, I think we both knew things could never be the same again. The pattern had been unknowingly transferred to the next generation. It had broken the relationship between my 5<sup>th</sup> child (Damilola) and her 2<sup>nd</sup> child (Toni). They used to be very close

The family letter is a good place to start the reflection on my family voyage mission. I had learned so much about the dynamics of my family of origin that I started praying for wisdom to be able to help my siblings take the same journey back to the origin of the rules and regulations that shaped our lives. What happened between my sister and I in 2014 represented an unhealthy pattern of resolving conflicts in the family? She was angry with me. She talked to my children and other siblings instead of confronting me. It is important that we get to the root of the problem so we can find healing to help us tear down the unhealthy pattern and start the process of replacing it with a healthy one.

By divine intervention my sister and I talked on the phone on November 12, 2021. We were talking about our parents' uprightness and unconditional love. We were both in good moods towards each other. It looked like old times when we talked and laughed freely with each other. I asked after the welfare of her husband. He had been abusive and engaged in adultery. My sister was so emotionally battered that she almost ran mad, but for the grace of God. I don't know why I did it. But I told her that she would have to forgive her husband completely for his infidelity and abuse. She exploded in anger and opened the bottle of canker worms. She literally told me I had fallen from grace to grass in her esteem. She declared that she was disappointed in me and would never discuss her life with me because I had betrayed her. She went into the event of 2014 without me asking her to tell me my offense. I was grateful that she was talking directly to me, this was truly a divine appointment. She shouted me down each time I tried to say something, thank God for the family voyage. I had learned to understand the difference between issues and events. Freddie, (in the professor's story), wanted juice and exploded because there was little left in the fridge. Wema yelled back that he was making much ado about nothing. Juice or anything could be the trigger event. Solving the trigger event of juice will resurface in another context to cause chaos. It is necessary to solve the real issue behind the presenting event.

So, I kept quiet and listened to her without further interruptions, praying for wisdom. That day, I had a doctor's appointment, so we had to postpone the conversation till another day. I told her that I appreciated her for confronting and opening her mind to me, apologized for running off to the doctors and promised to call her the next day. That next day, there was a problem between my brother and our half siblings about daddy's property. Truth required that I disagree with my

brother, and he was upset. And he accused me of betraying them by supporting the claims of the half siblings. Since that day of November 12 up until today the 15<sup>th</sup> of December, she ignored all my calls and text messages. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of December, I reached out to her twice through WhatsApp.

**My 1<sup>st</sup> text message in the morning of December 15** (which she did not respond to):

***Taye, I listened to your view on the issue of 2014. I was hoping you would take time to also listen to my view on the issue. I had told you then that I needed some information to help me complete my school project. You were the only one who did not make any attempt to respond. Tomorrow the 16<sup>th</sup> of December is the last day to submit the project. May God continue to help us all. Stay blessed.***

***Agape love  
Your sister.***

**My 2<sup>nd</sup> text message in the evening of the 15<sup>th</sup> of December**

***“Taye dear, I hope everything is alright with you and everybody in your family. I called you and I am not sure if you saw my missed call or not. Because I did not hear any response from you. We started a conversation into what happened in 2014. I listened to your view on the issue. I was hoping that you would take the time also to listen to my view on the issue. I had told you then that I needed some information to help me complete my school project. Yesterday I made the same request to all three of you. You were the only one who did not attempt to respond. I pray that all is well. Tomorrow the 16<sup>th</sup> of December is the last day to submit the project. May God continue to help us all. Stay blessed.”***

***Agape love  
Your sister.”***

**My sister's response on the morning of 16<sup>th</sup> December 2021**

***\* Antim', thank you for asking after our welfare; it's really appreciated.***

***I don't usually read forwarded messages, but when it's personally addressed to me like this one, I really appreciate such. Once again, thank you Antim'.***

***Boda Gbenga asked me yesterday, and I told him the ones I know; which are our paternal and maternal grandmothers which are respectively YETUNDE & MARIAN.”***

***\*Antim'*** is a special name she calls me when she feels safe and appreciative. I thanked God. that she responded. I knew by the tone of her text that God had

really intervened. I used the opportunity to mention one of the unhealthy patterns, we solve conflicts and deal with anger, that I had identified in my family voyage.

**My text in response on the 16<sup>th</sup> of December**

***“Taye, I thank you for responding. Gbenga gave me the information as you gave him. The purpose of the genogram project is to discover unhealthy patterns of behavior we inherited from our families of origin and replace it with healthy patterns. I have identified some unhealthy rules and roles which I am praying by the grace of God to change in my own family. I know how much we all love each other but we don’t know how to talk through conflicts without getting angry and nasty with each other.***

***Like I stated earlier, Gbenga gave me all the information you gave him. But I was still sad that you did not respond. I needed to know if you had cut me off again. And more importantly I wanted to be sure that you were all doing okay.***

***I hope we would be able to complete our discussion about the issue of 2014 to the glory of God. I don’t remember what I said on that day in 2014 because I was overwhelmed with sorrow and anguish of spirit. It must have been as ugly and terrible as you stated on November 12, 2021. That was my fault for allowing my sorrow to spill over into our relationship. I apologize for doing that. May God teach us all how to sow seeds of peace where there is strife. That we would learn how to disagree with each other without being disagreeable. I would have loved it if you had confronted me directly instead of hearing them from other members of the family. Once again, I thank you for responding. More blessings and anointing in the name of Jesus. All shall be well.***

***Agape love  
Your sister.”***

She called me twice on WhatsApp before she could reach me. She was so happy and excited to talk to me. I believe God had restored the relationship. I have hope that God would help us both to get past the event of 2014 and discover the real issue. I also pray that I would be able to resolve the unfinished issues with my other siblings. And that we will all work on the project of changing unhealthy patterns in our own generations.

My Family of Origin and its influence on my private and public life. –

## **My Family of Origin**

Six women (including my mother, 4 traditional wives and one political girlfriend), had a total of thirteen children for my father. My parents with all the wives (except the girlfriend), all children, and about 5 cousins lived under the same roof in a type of family compound with two levels. The main building was detached from the backyard and kitchen area. The way we lived was typical of how families lived during that time. Men had undue advantage and power in society. The elders in the family ruled in the affairs of every member of the clan. Nobody dared to disagree with an elder. There were some patterns of behavior in my family of origin that I vowed I would never repeat in my own family.

I vowed never to be a nonentity in my own marriage. I felt my mother was relegated to the background. My mother (Adeyemi) was a teacher before she got married to my father (Ajibade). He stopped her from teaching to become a fulltime housewife. She readily abandoned her life ambition to settle for a life of pleasing her husband. I never could understand why my father married so many wives and had the audacity to bring them to his matrimonial home because he wanted all his children to grow up under the same roof, loving each other. Neither could I ignore the complacency of my mother in accepting the job of nanny to all these children her husband brought home. Throughout their lifetime, she never opposed her husband on any issue - good or bad for her. He literally had the power of life and death over her. I saw her as a weakling. I vowed never to become like her. I determined that I was never going to be a doormat to any man. That I would never

be rendered irrelevant in the lives of my children. That I would have a strong voice in the decisions that impart my well-being. I was ignorant of the power of family as a system in shaping adult behaviors. I knew I wanted to move away from the type of life my mother had. I saw a clear picture of what I wanted to move away from but had no clear picture of the promised land I wanted to get to, nor the right path to take to get there. I knew I wanted mutual respect and understanding in my marriage. But instead, there was the same infidelity and male chauvinism that I witnessed growing up in my family of origin.

### **The influence of my family of origin on my personal life and career.**

There was a lack of healthy and consistent family rules and roles. Conflicts were usually resolved by getting a third party involved. And if the warring parties do not reach an agreement through the intervention, that relationship could be strained and cut off for a while. After a period, without discussing the issue, the anger would mysteriously disappear into thin air. The warring parties would start talking again by an unwritten code and stop fighting without getting to the root of the initial problem that caused the rift.

I also discovered that in my family of origin, there was an unwritten code for expressing anger, and it created more woes than good. When angry we either use the silent passive aggressive treatment to communicate the anger or we exploded. The anger was usually expressed in a loud uncensored accusation, which we called “telling the truth to shame the devil” In most cases each party held to their views

on the issue as if only their truth was the only truth that mattered. The two parties may part ways for a while to cool down on their anger. Then they bury the anger to glorify God and move on with life with the philosophy that it was the Christian way to forgive seventy times seven times.

There were also legacies of respect for elders, honesty, hard work, and other virtues like integrity and accepting responsibility for one's action. These virtues were held in high esteem in my family of origin. For instance, when I failed the exam from elementary school to secondary (equivalent of middle school in the USA), my father had the influence to put me in the school of my choice, but he made me wait another year to retake the entrance exam.

Thus I do not attempt to take short cuts in life. At work, I would not bend character to obtain a privilege or promotion. At home, I encourage my children to be authentic and to always speak the truth. Speaking the truth has helped me from being afraid in difficult situations and gotten me out of trouble. I remember one incident as a home school instructor in Nigeria. The parents were racist and had reported they did not want me to come and teach their child. The supervisors had told them the date they were coming to observe me unofficially based on the schedule I gave them. The parents changed the schedule which they had the right to do. Since I completed the weekly hours for that week, I did not know I had to call the home office to let them know. When they called to inform me of the unofficial observation, I explained to the supervisor that I did not teach him on that day because the parents were travelling so, I taught him on a different day that week. The supervisor warned me to always inform the office of every change in

schedule ahead of time. The truth saved me from the evil plan of the racist parents.

## Genogram and the narrative of the family members.

My paternal grandfather, Joshua Akerele was a carpenter. He specialized in roofing churches. My grandmother was a princess in Kwara state. They met when grandfather worked in Kwara state. They had four children, two older girls and twins (my father and his twin brother). That was the period when they killed twins of the same sex. His twin brother was killed immediately at birth.

When it was time for my grandfather to return to his own state. His powerful father-in-law, the king prevented him from taking his wife and children. So, he left without his family. He told the king that he may deprive him of his wife but that his son will look for him. It happened as he predicted. It was said that somebody called my father a bastard (a great insult and an offense). So, he left the palace alone in search of his father. Later his mother and sisters sneaked out of the palace to follow him. My paternal grandfather got a wife in almost every state he worked. He had 5 wives

I could not find much information about my maternal grandparents. My maternal grandfather worked with the railway in the city of Lagos. He married high up in society in Lagos. Then he married my grandmother as the second wife. They had three girls. Mama Ado, my mother and then mama Mary. That was how we addressed them. I did not get the opportunity to interview my cousins. I hope to do that at some point as soon as possible.

My parents got married in 1948. Their first daughter died as an infant. They were separated in 1955 for about one year. He married another woman. During the period of separation, my mother and I had to live with my maternal grandmother in the village. Daddy had five wives. He had many political girlfriends but only one of them had two boys for him. Daddy had two children with one of his father's wives who were about ten years older than me.

The son he had with his father's wife slept with one of his wives (Beatrice) and they had a daughter (open secret not confirmed or denied). Another uncle slept with the same wife for to have a second child. When that wife died, daddy wanted me to bring her children up with my own children. I rejected that request. I reminded him that it was an open secret in the family who the father of each child was. He did not agree or deny my statement. He simply replied that God Almighty loaned the children to him to bring them up well and that was good reason for him to care for them. But I did not want my children to experience the politics and rivalry of a polygamous settings. I gave him my word that I would take care of them, but I could not handle their living with me. He trusted that I would do what I promised, and he did not pursue the issue further.

Daddy took care of his family as well as his siblings' family. He gave almost all the rooms in the first level of his house to his brother and his family (2 wives and many children). He also paid for the children schooling. He brought all his children and dead siblings' children (who were living with their maternal relatives) into his

household. He was responsible for the education of many cousins and youths in the village.

We got married in 1975, separated in 1978, and came back together in 1980. My husband had an identical twin. His brother was already married with two children. He and his brother's family were living in the same apartment before we got married. They expected that arrangement to continue when we got married. I was having none of that and said so without going through anybody to talk to him for me. Even though I did not know or understand a triangle at the time. My resolve not to be a doormat, not to be relegated to the background, and not to accept a polygamous arrangement of mixing my children with other children gave me the boldness to speak. They, (he and his twin brother), did not like what I said. He broke up the relationship. According to my husband, when he and his brother had an argument, his new girlfriend was ready to join him in packing his belongings out of his twin brothers apt. It was then he decided to reconcile with me. He said he respected my candid nature. We have 6 children (2 boys and four girls.) and 8 grandchildren. One of the girls died. Towards the end of his life, he asked his children for forgiveness for going polygamous. He cursed all his children who would ever go polygamous that they would have a double portion of his sorrow that nobody could understand.

Some Gems gleaned from my Family Voyage

In my voyage, I gained the understanding that family is a system of relationships and interpersonal dynamics. I was able to identify some rules and regulations that operated formally and informally in my family of origin. I learned to differentiate between healthy and toxic family legacies. I learned skills that I can use to destroy sinful patterns and begin to replace them with healthier legacies in my family. I am going to stop the unhealthy methods of unhealthy triangles and begin to introduce the healthy ways of confrontation and effective communication. I already started with dealing with the uncompleted issue of 2014 with my sister. I intend to do this with all other siblings, and within my own family now.

My personality type was categorized as **ISTP**. Most of my life I had admired people who were outgoing and lively. People who could whip up and engage in conversation with anybody at the drop of a hat. This was what attracted me to my husband. For years we have been calling each other all kinds of names none of which was pleasant. Studying personality types has open opportunities to see my husband as different personalities. So, I stopped thinking something was either wrong with him or with me.